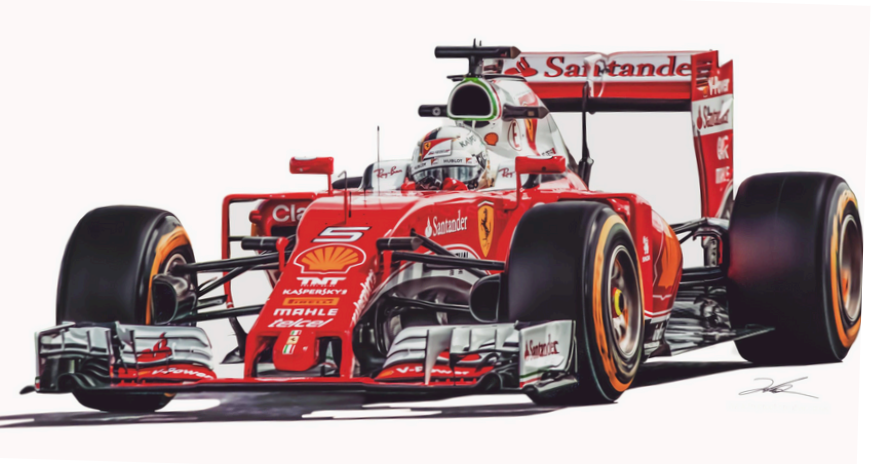


# DRIVING INCLUSION IN MOTORSPORT: EXPLORING FAN MOTIVATIONS AND GENDERED ENGAGEMENT WITH FORMULA 1 MARKETING



## INTRODUCTION

20th century pseudoscience discouraged women from competing in high-intensity sport due to a supposed risk of damaging the reproductive system (Coakley and Pike, 2014). This contributed to Formula 1 being culturally accepted as a male space, attracting male fans. Archaic marketing strategies may have continued this social convention: until 2018 women were employed by Formula 1 as provocatively dressed 'grid girls', preserving the notion of women having a passive relationship with the sport, instead of being encouraged to get involved as fans, engineers, and drivers (Tippett, 2020).

Developing effective, inspiring marketing strategies is therefore crucial to steer away from the 'pale, stale, male' (Drew, 2024) culture that the sport was built on. However, current strategies may still be working off the assumption that motivations of F1 fans are uniform across gender which could be limiting growth. Gaining and affirming women as F1 fans could lead to developing a more diverse next generation of racers.

## AIMS

The problem statement guiding this study is the lack of understanding of the motivations, attitudes, and behaviours of female Formula 1 fans, which limits the development of effective and inclusive F1 marketing strategies. This research therefore aims to investigate whether there are gendered differences between the motivations of F1 fans. Thus, informing marketing strategies that could effectively grow the female fanbase. Investing in growing and better serving all audiences would welcome inclusion and long-term loyalty whilst unlocking commercial value that remains untapped, despite nearing gender parity on paper.

## METHODOLOGY

A survey was distributed both at the 2025 British Grand Prix and online, targeting self-identified F1 fans in the UK.

Funk et al. (2009) measured five motivational aspects of rugby fans: Socialisation, Performance, Excitement, Esteem, and Diversion (SPEED). This framework was evaluated to be suitable to this research, however, it was adapted to include 'Engineering' because the technical complexity of cutting-edge car technology is a central quality of F1 that can not be omitted.

Each element consisted of two items and questions were modified to the context of F1, for example, 'gracefulness', and 'elegance' became 'race strategy' and 'high-level skill of drivers'. Participants rated their agreement with each SPEED statement, for example, 'Watching F1 gives me the opportunity to bond with others', using a 0-100 slider scale.

Attachment points to teams and drivers were also examined in order to determine the extent of emotional connections to F1. Behavioural questions asked how long participants had been fans, and how they engage with F1 content, whilst attitudinal questions explored whether they feel valued by F1 and reflected in its branding.



- S** **Socialisation**  
Engaging with F1 to connect with other fans through discussion and shared experiences.
- P** **Performance**  
Motivation is driven by the skill of drivers and the strategy of races.
- E** **Engineering**  
Enjoyment of F1 is based on a love of cars and cutting-edge car technology.
- E** **Excitement**  
Motivation to experience the thrill, drama, and energy of races and rivalries.
- E** **Esteem**  
Feeling pride or personal achievement when a favourite team or driver wins.
- D** **Diversion**  
Using F1 as a way to escape daily routine and take a mental break.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most frequently reported length of time being a fan among women was 3-5 years (38.1%), whereas among men it was 20+ years (38.5%). This aligns with F1's historically male-dominated culture, but reveals that F1's recent diversity initiatives have likely been effective at gaining female fans.

No significant difference was found in seven of the eight engagement options. So, gender alone may not strongly determine how fans interact with F1. However, a significant difference was observed in women's greater interaction with F1's official social media accounts ( $p = .048$ ). F1 should recognise and utilise this in female-focused campaigns. 54.4% of all respondents reported engaging with driver/team social media accounts, underlining the central role this tool could play in further connecting both genders to the sport. Netflix's 'Drive to Survive' docuseries may have attracted fans interested in behind-the-scenes access, or this could indicate a social shift away from highly procured celebrity content e.g. glossy, edited promo videos.

No statistically significant gender differences were revealed across the motivational and attitudinal facets tested, highlighting that men and women may watch F1 for similar reasons and hold similar attitudes towards the extent that they feel valued by F1 and reflected in its branding. However, effect size estimates illuminate subtle trends, with women reporting slightly higher scores for Excitement, Esteem, and Diversion facets, demonstrating that they might experience stronger emotional and social motivations than men to be fans of F1. Women also viewed F1's female-engagement efforts as less successful than men did, yet felt more represented in F1's marketing. Men reported feeling slightly less valued as fans. Therefore, men may recognise inclusive efforts towards women but not identify with the messages themselves. These differences underline the importance of ensuring that marketing strategies resonate with all genders without alienating some groups.

## CONCLUSION

Dennis de Munck, Head of Employer Branding and University Partnerships at Ferrari, described in interview that Ferrari believes in an inclusive 'one Ferrari' approach, not tailoring marketing to individual genders. These findings support this practice as fandom in F1 seems to be largely shared across genders rather than strongly divided by them.

However, women may engage with official F1 social media more than men. These channels should be a focus if future initiatives are launched to target female fans. The ever-rising importance of social media is highlighted for targeting both men and women, and should be used to value fan contributions as modest trends highlight that current marketing strategies could be lacking in making fans feel represented and valued. These effects could become more pronounced in future research using larger samples. To conclude, strategies that appreciate fan support, e.g. spotlighting fan artwork, race prediction polls, or ticket giveaways, and are social-media based could be vital for sustaining and growing the global appeal of Formula 1.

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